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ABSTRACT

This report responds to a 1987 task force study which urged Oklahoma to develop a superior system of higher education through implementing 97 recommendations in 5 major areas. This report notes that, without reform funding or major legislation, higher education in Oklahoma has completed or made major progress on three-fourths of the 77 recommendations for which it was responsible. The first section lists specific achievements implemented for each of the following five areas: (1) leadership (e.g., annual strategic planning sessions among governing boards); (2) quality (better students, better programs, and better faculty); (3) efficiency (such as increased numbers of programs offered jointly by colleges and vocational-technical schools); (4) budget reform (development of a long-range, peer-comparison budget system for allocating new funds); and (5) governance (a study of existing governance patterns and recommendations for change). The second section identifies major challenges for the future in the areas of access, mission, economic development, the value of higher education, telecommunications, and funding. (DB)

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ACCOMPLISHMENTS & CHALLENGES

A Review of Significant Accomplishments and an Overview of Major Challenges

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Oklahoma State System of Higher Education

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"Nearly everyone involved in the debate agrees, however, that even if (higher education) reform proves disappointing as an economic panacea, something in the state's collective psyche has changed in a way that will never change back. What really is different, says OU political science professor Don Kash, is that now, whether you are liberal or conservative, the conventional wisdom is that the future of the state is tied up with brains and intellect."

Alan Ehrenhalt, in "An Oklahoma I Had Never Seen Before: Alternative Views of Oklahoma History"

In 1987, Oklahoma higher education received a report card — and the grades were not good. Written by a Legislatively mandated citizen taskforce, *Oklahoma's Secret Crisis* was an indepth examination of the state's higher education system.

While lauding the system for having achieved "universal access," the task force noted that "the economic future of Oklahoma and the basic quality of life for its citizens are substantially dependent on the creation of a superior system of higher education."

The task force urged Oklahoma higher education, the governor and the Legislature to make a fundamental commitment to and the sacrifices necessary to achieve "universal quality" and outlined 97 recommendations in five major areas.

Higher education was responsible for 77 of the 97 recommendations and began almost immediately to undertake a widespread revamping of the state system of higher education. Without reform funding and without major legislation, higher education has completed or has made major progress on three-fourths of the recommendations for which it was responsible.

The massive initiatives implemented by Oklahoma higher education were not limited to the task force recommendations and they were not short-term; their impact has been far reaching and has changed and will continue to change the very essence of education in Oklahoma. Those achievements are listed in the accomplishments section of this document.

But Oklahoma higher education has not completed its work. Higher education is now undertaking the second phase of the systemwide effort by melding *access* and *quality* and focusing on providing Oklahomans access to quality educational programs and student services. This second phase focuses on key taskforce initiatives, as well as new challenges, and is outlined in the last section of this document.

Described just eight years ago as "Oklahoma's Secret Crisis," the state system of higher education is now seen as a viable force shaping the future of our state and the quality of life for its citizens. No longer the state's "secret crisis," Oklahoma higher education has become Oklahoma's recognized answer to succeeding now and in the new millennium.

February 1995

"The miraculous part of our experience, however, was that this report was not put on the shelf as every one of its predecessors had been. It was acted upon. The direction of the entire (Oklahoma higher education) system . . . has been turned."

James Tolbert III, chairman, 1987 Oklahoma Higher Education Task Force

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESULTING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

LEADERSHIP

The task force recommended developing stronger higher education leadership. Higher education developed and implemented:

- The Regents Education Program which prepares members of Oklahoma's 20 higher education governing boards for their responsibilities
- Annual strategic planning sessions among governing boards to share problems and goals
- A search policy and grant program to identify highly competent college and university presidential candidates

"The challenges facing American higher education today have prompted many institutions and states to address the need for change. Oklahoma is one of the states addressing change, but what appears to distinguish this state is the fundamental and comprehensive nature of the changes in its higher education system over the past several years."

Robert H. Atwell, president, American Council on Education

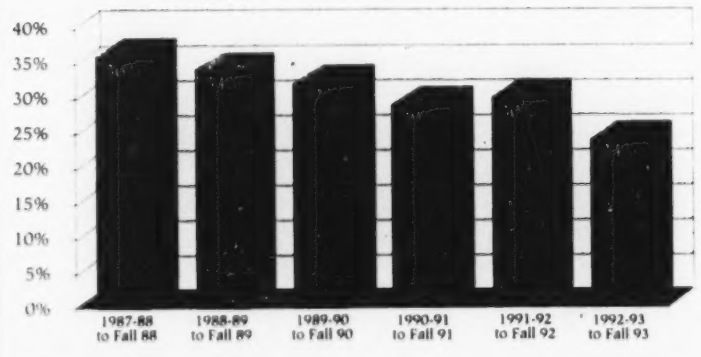
QUALITY

The task force said if higher education were to achieve quality, improvements would be needed in several areas: better students, better programs and better faculty. Higher education responded by implementing a number of far-reaching initiatives:

1. Better Students

- Strengthened admission standards to better ensure high school students are prepared for college
- Enhanced retention standards to encourage college students to maintain grades necessary for graduation
- Increased number of core courses needed for college entry to strengthen high school preparation for college
- Implemented course placement policy to ensure entering freshmen are placed in courses that meet their skills and abilities
- Offers Summer Academies in Math and Science for eighth through 12th graders
- Encourages student performance through new merit scholarship programs such as the Academic Scholars program, Regional Scholarship program and the Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Program
- Measures student progress systemwide with four levels of assessment

Freshman Dropout Rate, 1988-1993



As a result of higher education initiatives to better prepare students for college-level work, more freshmen are staying in college. The freshman dropout rate fell from 36 percent in fall 1988 to 24 percent in fall 1993. This 12 percentage point reduction reflects the retention of an additional 6,348 students in fall 1993.

"Your leadership in progressing toward excellence here in Oklahoma is well known. Representing extraordinary success is the status of the response to the 1987 Higher Education Task Force Recommendations. You are importantly concerned about the future. You are not resting your laurels on what you have accomplished so far."

Constance Berry Newman, member of the Wingspread Group, which studied society's needs from higher education

QUALITY

2. Better Programs

- Implemented Academic Planning /Resource Allocation (APRA), a comprehensive, coordinated academic planning and budgeting process
- Identified specific criteria for analyzing existing programs and new program requests
- Strengthened college core curriculum by requiring a 37-hour core at the lower-division (freshmen and sophomore) level and adding a math requirement
- Excluded physical education courses from minimum bachelor's degree requirements and grade point calculations
- Established computerized data linkage with the Employment Security Commission to adjust academic programs to manpower demands
- Conducted a systemwide review, implemented an ongoing teacher education reform plan, and are working with the Teacher Education Committee
- Conducted reviews of aviation/aerospace, teacher education and nursing programs to eliminate unnecessary duplication
- Organized Council of Graduate Education to review and strengthen programs at the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University and to eliminate unnecessary duplication

3. Better Faculty

- Instituted endowment program: More than $56.5 million raised in private funds to match state endowment program and create 185 chairs, professorships and lectureships
- Set budget guidelines to provide faculty merit increases; annual merit rewards have ranged between 3.0% - 6.2% over the last five years

"We are not certain that higher education yet appreciates the kind of changes that have to be made, although I would note that Oklahoma, more than most states, has made the kind of fundamental restructuring changes that are required for the future. Under Chancellor Brisch and an active State Board of Regents, you have madethe cuts and found the efficiencies that others dream about."

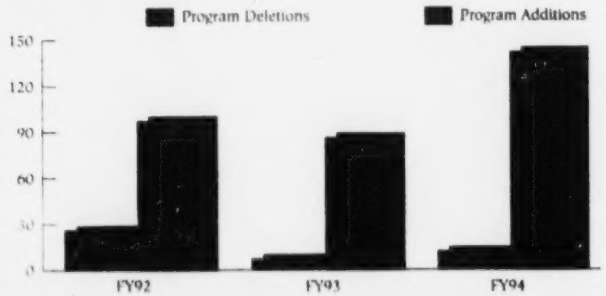
Gerald L. Baliles, former governor of Virginia and chairman of the Southern Regional Education Board's Commission f or Educational Quality

EFFICIENCY

Task force recommendations called for increased coordination and cooperation within higher education, as well as with vocational-technical and common education. Higher education efforts have resulted in:

- 12 Oklahoma colleges and universities teaming up with 19 vocational-technical schools to jointly offer more than 170 programs
- Oklahoma City-area two-year colleges sharing faculty, facilities, courses and programs
- State Regents and American College Testing Program (ACT) working together to provide high schools with reports on their students' college performance
- State Regents and ACT implementing an assessment procedure to determine the learning needs of students grades K-12
- Producing brochures and videos to help high school students prepare for college
- Developing a course-by-course listing of specific skills and knowledge high school students need to acquire to be successful in college and distributing the list to high schools
- Decreasing guaranteed student loan default rates; default rates fell 6.5% between FY88 - FY92
- Enhancing the state's telecommunications network — OneNet — to provide interactive distance learning, worldwide computer network data and state services to all areas of Oklahoma

Academic Planning/Resource Allocation
Program Deletions and Additions



From FY92 through FY94, Oklahoma colleges and universities eliminated 325 programs while adding only 45 for a net reduction of 280 programs. As a result, scarce resources were reallocated to high priority academic programs and student services.

BUDGET REFORM

Task force recommendations focused on budget reform. Higher education moved forward by:

- Instituting a long-range, peer-comparison budget system for allocating new funds
- Basing funding allocations on objectives, performance and resource needs
- Providing incentive funding to attract top students and faculty and to support selected improvements in student services and specified programs
- Passing a $350 million capital bond issue in 1992
- Increasing external funding for research by 231% from FY88 to FY95

GOVERNANCE

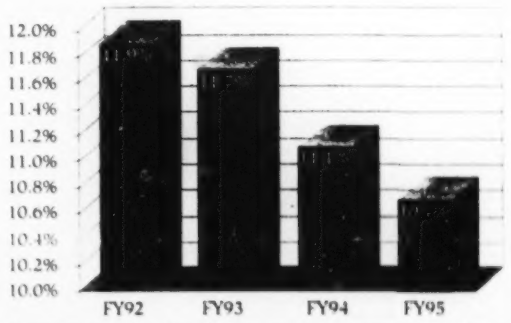
"Oklahoma is one of a handful of states that provides and requires annual orientation for newly appointed as well as continuing members of public college and university governing boards. Many boards have also conducted an assessment of their own performance, in response to recommendations from the State Regents. These two new traditions — board performance assessment and continuing board member education — will help ensure competent and informed governance of public higher education in Oklahoma. And they are superb examples of what other states should be emulating as part of sensible reform agendas."

Richard T. Ingram, president, Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges

Task force recommendations for restructuring existing boards of regents led to:

- A study of the existing governance pattern and recommendations for change

Administrative Costs as a Percentage of Total College and University Expenditures



To further increase the efficient use of resources, Oklahoma colleges and universities have cut administrative costs and set cost caps. Administrative costs have decreased from 11.9 percent of total expenditures in FY92 to 10.7 percent in FY95.

OVERVIEW OF MAJOR CHALLENGES

Although Oklahoma higher education has implemented many of the Secret Crisis reform recommendations, additional Secret Crisis recommendations and other priority concerns remain.

Phase II of higher education's systemwide effort consists of focusing on key task force initiatives and undertaking other priorities to ensure access to quality higher education programs and services.

"If seven years ago, when today's high school seniors were entering the fifth grade, you had told them and their parents about the improvements that would take place in Oklahoma higher education before they would graduate from high school, I suspect the most common reactions would have been appreciation and skepticism. Persons would have doubted that these changes could come about in seven years, particularly if they had known that the percentage of the state budget invested in higher education would decrease during that time.

"Oklahoma has shown real persistence in its efforts to improve higher education. That persistence is paying off."

Mark Musick, president, Southern Regional Education Board

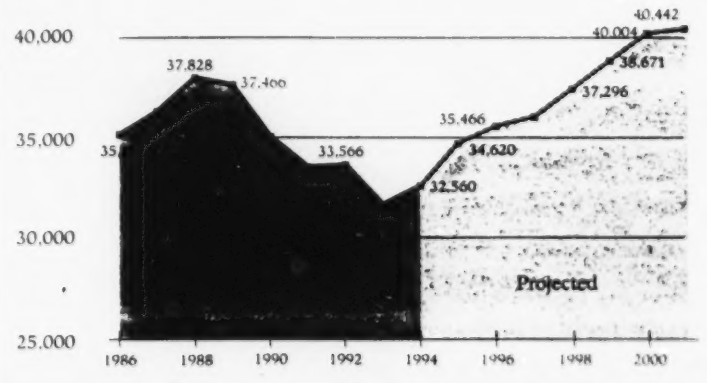
ACCESS

Although the task force declared in 1987 that the access battle had been won, current figures show that may not be the case for long. Reasons include:

- An Oklahoma Futures report showing a need for 50,000 additional bachelor's degree holders in the state workforce
- A projected 23.5% increase in high school graduates between now and 2001 will result in an estimated minimum of 18,050 additional college students by 2001
- However, even more high school graduates are expected to attend college as higher admission standards, information on student performance, and the implementation of HB 1017 — a common education funding and reform act — result in better prepared students
- In addition, it is anticipated that more students will be staying in college as a result of improved retention standards

Higher education and state policy leaders must deliberate the public policy issues and funding needs resulting from the predicted enrollment increase. Accommodating growing numbers of students and accounting for annual inflation will require an additional $151 million.

Oklahoma High School Graduation Rates



Increasing numbers of high school graduates will affect the state's already burdened higher education system. Oklahoma higher education will require an additional $151 million to accommodate the estimated minimum of 18,050 new college students by 2001.

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MISSION

The task force also recommended better distinguishing the missions of the institutions. Higher education is moving to:

- Clarify assignments within the higher education system
- Refine institutional mission statements to ensure the efficient use of resources, to eliminate unnecessary duplication, and to provide quality academic programs and student services to all qualified citizens
- Apply the Academic Planning/Resource Allocation concepts and procedures currently used for determining institutional priorities to the entire state system of higher education

"The actions which regents, college and university administrators and the State Regents' staff have jointly undertaken to restructure operations, focus missions as a state delivery system and on each of the campuses, and enhance the efficiency and quality of the campuses and the system are worthy of national recognition. It is apparent that those of you in Oklahoma have embraced a vision of change which will ensure a bright future for the citizens of the state."

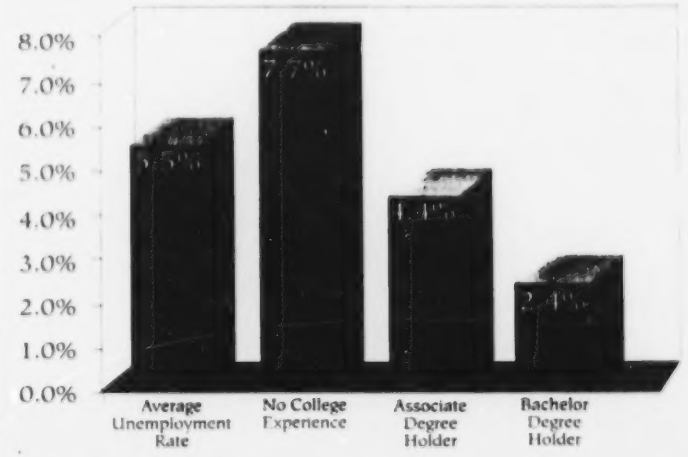
James B. Appleberry, president, American Association of State Colleges and Universities

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The task force recommended higher education take a more active role in economic development. Higher education is taking steps to:

- Make the resources and expertise within the state system of higher education more available to business and industry
- Further enhance the business development services higher education offers business and industry. Currently, almost 200 specific business development programs and services assist some 2,000 businesses
- Better prepare and equip faculty and staff to assist business and industry
- Increase interaction and communication between business and higher education to better ascertain business and industry's needs

Oklahoma Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment



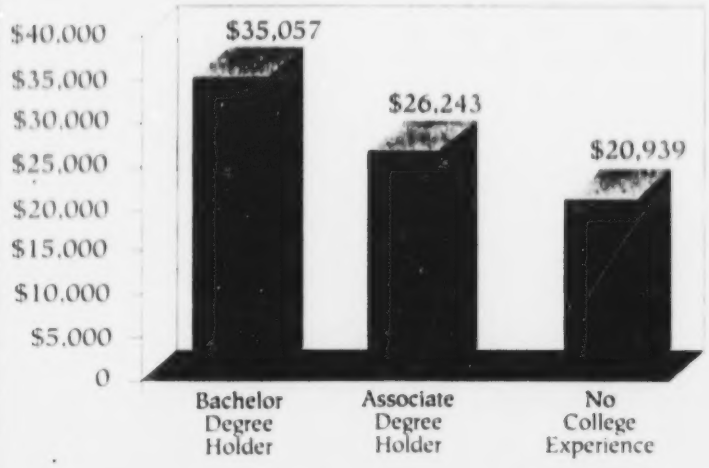
Oklahoma college education prepares Oklahomans for jobs in today's workforce. In 1989, Oklahoma bachelor's degree holders had an unemployment rate of 2.4 percent and associate degree holders had an unemployment rate of 4.4 percent, compared to 7.7 percent for Oklahomans without college experience. (U.S. Census Bureau)

VALUE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The task force said Oklahomans must be better informed of the strengths and needs of the state's higher education system and must be challenged to increase financial support for higher education. Higher education is moving forward by:

- Better determining the public's perceptions, expectations and needs of higher education
- Forming a Council of Communicators to more efficiently communicate Oklahoma higher education's benefits, quality and value
- Developing a comprehensive, statewide communications plan

Earning Potential by Educational Attainment



Increased earning power is one of the many benefits of a college education. In 1989, Oklahoma bachelor degree holders earned an average $35,057 a year and Oklahomans with associate degrees earned an average $26,243 a year, compared to $20,939 for Oklahomans with no college experience. (U.S. Census Bureau).

"Educational institutions, says Peter Drucker, are the most important social institutions of the 21st Century as 'knowledge workers' drive the world economy. Oklahoma has obviously taken this message to heart. The progress already made by the Board of Regents and the plans laid for the future are right on target. Higher expectations for all students, cost-effective delivery systems, creative use of technology, governance restructuring, cooperation with K-12 and the business community — these will be the keys to success. Keep up the good work, Oklahoma!"

James R. Mingle, executive director, State Higher Education Executive Officers

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

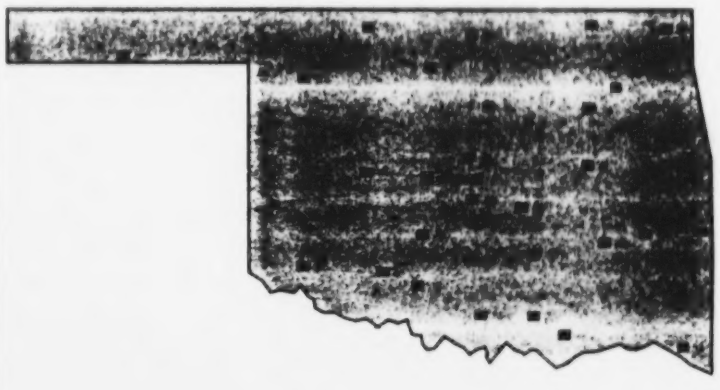
The task force called for continued telecommunications planning in Oklahoma higher education. Higher education is:

- Increasing educational access through long-distance learning
- Seeking to expand the state's telecommunications system in order to provide access to state services and worldwide information throughout Oklahoma
- Using telecommunications to achieve clarity among Oklahoma colleges and universities as to their missions and functions

"In today's global- and information-based economy, success of a state or nation will depend greatly on the quality of its educational systems. There will be no alternative to having a citizenry that possesses a broad general education as well as skills that permit business and industry to be globally competitive. It is clear that Oklahoma's educational leaders understand this reality and that progress made toward accomplishing recommendations contained in the 1987 Higher Education Task Force report move the state positively in this direction."

David Pierce, president, American Association of Community Colleges

OneNet — Oklahoma Higher Education's Telecommunications System



Studies are underway to expand and utilize OneNet, Oklahoma higher education's telecommunications system, as the state's communications and information network.

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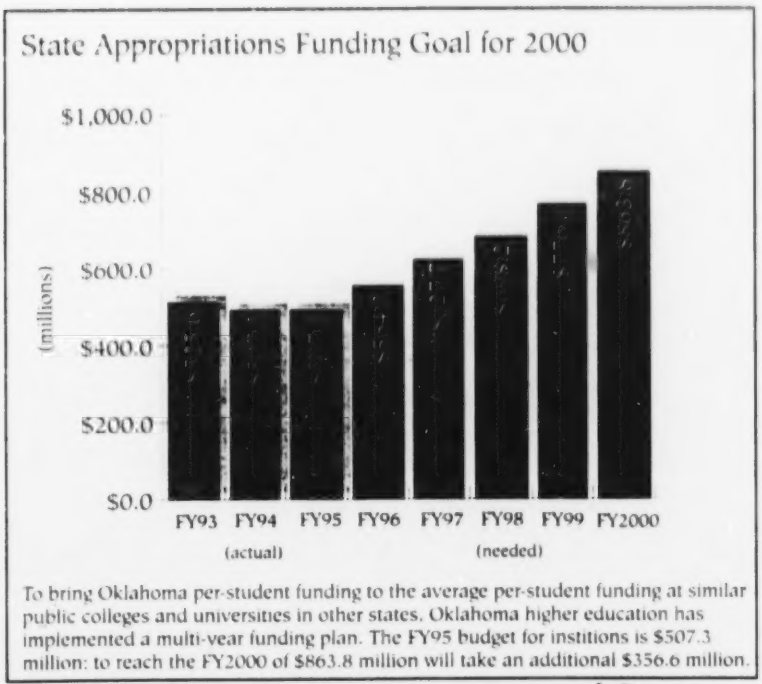
FUNDING

The task force called for:

- Increasing per-student appropriations to the national average
- Reallocating resources from other government sectors, finding alternate funding sources for common education, and increasing taxes and earmarking revenue for higher education
- Increasing tuition levels to 30% of educational costs

Oklahoma higher education is:

- Implementing a multi-year tuition plan with the gradual goal of students contributing $1 toward their college education for every $2 contributed by taxpayers; student contributions rose from 15% of educational costs in FY87 to 25% in FY95
- Carrying out a multi-year plan to gradually increase state per-student funding to the average per-student funding found at similar public colleges and universities in other states; Oklahoma students are currently funded at 57% of per-student funding at similar public colleges and universities in other states



To bring Oklahoma per-student funding to the average per-student funding at similar public colleges and universities in other states, Oklahoma higher education has implemented a multi-year funding plan. The FY95 budget for institions is $507.3 million; to reach the FY2000 of $863.8 million will take an additional $356.6 million.

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